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FANCY FOOTWORK

Spencer Freedman has been dominating the court with his nimble moves from a very young age

BY DAN ARRITT 12/28/2015

Sweat runs down the neck of Spencer Freedman until it forms a dark ring around his collar.

He dribbles basketballs with both hands, through his legs, behind his back, never losing rhythm between his fingertips, the rubber and the wood floor. Freedman then drives to the basket still dribbling both balls, lays one in with his left hand and then returns to midcourt, where he takes a similar route to the rim, this time shooting the ball with his right hand.

Flawless crossover dribbles, clever pump fakes and, of course, plenty of free throws. Nothing is skipped or taken for granted during this videotaped workout.

Freedman was 10 years old.

Now a 17-year-old sophomore at Mater Dei and one of the team's starting guards, Freedman hasn't let up with his vigorous training, even arriving at the gymnasium early in the morning several days a week to perfect his game.

"It's just good to get some shots up and get working," he says. "Off the move, off the dribble, even standstill shots. ... and definitely take free throws."

The positive results having been pouring in for years for Freedman, who's already been offered scholarships to a handful of schools, including USC.

Only now, Mater Dei followers have the opportunity to see him up close.

Freedman spent his freshman year 50 miles away at Santa Monica High School, then transferred to Mater Dei last June. He built chemistry with his new teammates over the summer, became familiar with his surroundings at Mater Dei in the fall and has been settling in nicely with the Monarchs this winter.

"It's been pretty incredible," Freedman says. "The experience is great and the coaching is incredible. Teammates are great and everything about the entire Mater Dei experience, it's unbelievable."

Freedman played his best game of the season Dec. 15 against Long Beach Wilson in a pool-play game at the North Orange County Tournament, making seven 3-pointers and scoring 24 points in the 78-46 victory at Sonora High School, which kept the Monarchs undefeated at 8-0.

"He can shoot the ball, he can handle the ball, he's got good game awareness," says Mater Dei coach Gary McKnight. "He's pretty conniving and he's learning how to play defense too."

Freedman, who is listed at 6 foot 1, is a natural point guard, but can switch over to shooting guard without a blink. That makes him a great fit with Mater Dei senior Bailey Stout, who can also play both guard positions.

"Whoever gets the ball, brings it up, the other plays the [shooting guard]," McKnight says of his two-guard system.

Clay McKnight, who starred at Mater Dei while playing for his father from 1993-95 and now serves as an assistant coach, knows a few things about shooting. He still holds several Mater Dei school records, including 3-pointers in a season (131), 3-point shooting percentage in a season (49.5) and for a career (45.2).

Clay McKnight says he first spotted Freedman when he was 8 or 9 years old at a UCLA camp where he volunteered. McKnight was impressed by what he saw back then, and is even more impressed now. Not just how Freedman performs on the court, but how he works during his "off" hours.

"It's going to be real fun to watch him for three years," he says. "I get a front-row seat."

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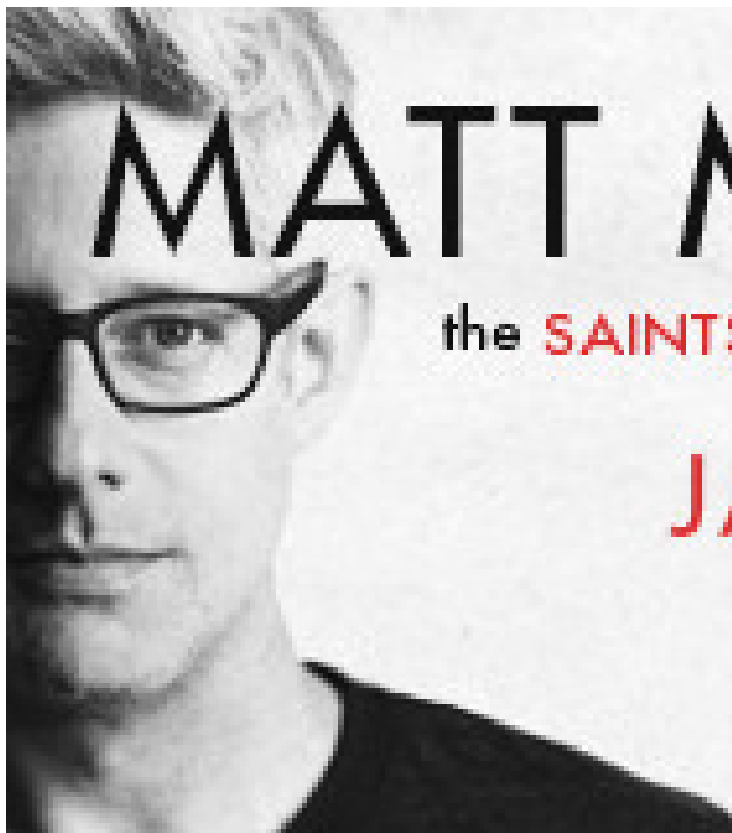
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